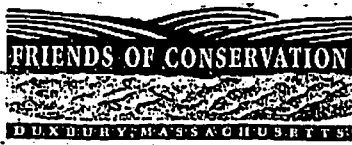


Conservation



The Value of Conservation

In response to Rte. 3, which transformed Duxbury from a rural to a suburban area, far-sighted town planners in 1968-69 designed a plan to acquire greenbelts consisting of watersheds with their upland buffers. The intent was to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, and esthetic values, while providing a framework around which development could occur.

Town meetings made major land purchases from 1970 through 1977 and, until 1981, appropriated a Conservation Fund to be available for smaller purchases. Then the conservation effort stalled. After a hiatus of 16 years, last year's town meeting re-established the Conservation Fund which enabled the Commission to acquire several key parcels. However, from 1977 to 1998 there has been only one large conservation purchase, Waiting Hill in 1986. For those 120 acres the town paid \$3.4 million, of which \$1 million was later reimbursed.

The first 4 articles at the Special Town Meeting on Monday, June 1, propose to purchase 4 parcels of land, a total of 375 acres for \$2.2 million, with the hope of \$500,000 reimbursement. Passage will require a 2/3-vote and a ballot election on Saturday, June 13 to approve funding.

Can we afford this land? The impact on the average tax bill will be approximately \$40, but at about the time the interest payments begin, the larger interest payments for Waiting Hill will end. A smaller debt will replace the larger one. The Finance Committee has joined other town boards in unanimously supporting all 4 land acquisition articles. Adding to our open space framework makes sense for fiscal, as well as environmental, reasons. Because new houses cost the Town more in services than they provide in taxes, borrowing to buy land saves money in the long run.

Do we really need this land? In 1998 we find ourselves in a situation analogous to that of the late 1960's. Then Rte. 3 was causing a surge in growth that threatened to over-burden the tax base, outstrip resources, compromise water quality, and destroy the rural appearance of the town; today the train to Boston, the proposed widening of Rte. 3, and a strong economy are accelerating growth. Then Duxbury had fewer than 100 acres in open space, one of the poorest records in the state. Today we have let our open space program languish for 12 years while development has continued unabated.

In 1968-69, town boards and dedicated volunteers planned a campaign to redress the balance, and no one today regrets their actions. How will we respond to a similar challenge in 1998? Will posterity be grateful to us?

If you have yet to see the 4 parcels, don't miss the "open house" on Sunday, May 31, from 1 to 4 pm. Members of the Conservation Commission and Open Space and Recreation Committee will be at Camp Wing (Temple St. just east of Keene St.), Summer St. (Rte. 53 just west of Keene St.), Union St. (behind the house at 878 Union St.), and Mayflower St. (across from the stone marking the Knapp Town Forest). Then be sure to vote on June 1 and June 13.

If you want to help in any way with Friends of Conservation, write to: PO Box 1528, Duxbury, 02331 or call Dot Baker at 934-2302 or Kay Foster at 934-2663.